

Dear Appropriations Committee members:

I apologize that I cannot testify in person due to a prior commitment.

I emphatically believe that it is a mistake to consolidate OPA and CHRO into one agency for the following reasons.

First, the agencies have conflicting agendas. While OPA exists to fight for the rights of all people with disabilities, CHRO is an adjudication agency for civil rights only. OPA staff members frequently represent people in hearings at CHRO. It is a conflict of interest for one agency to both represent individuals and adjudicate their cases.

Second and very importantly, federal law requires that OPA be an independent agency in order to receive federal funds. If OPA is subsumed into a parent agency, we risk losing all federal support for the agency and perhaps being in violation of federal law.

Third, as I understand the proposed agency structure, it will be administratively top-heavy, while OPA and probably CHRO need more staff to serve clients directly.

I have been an OPA client and also sit on its Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) Advisory Council.

From both perspectives, it is clear that the state will not be served well by combining these agencies.

I hope you will oppose such a consolidation.

Sincerely,

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